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# LEVIATHAN AND THE PEOPLE\*

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Two or three years ago, a newspaper, in reporting a speech made not far from the site of Monticello, altered slightly, though with somewhat startling result, the wording of a famous dictum of Mr. Jefferson. The speaker had quoted the much-worn, but on the whole well-worn, aphorism concerning eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man. He was, according to the report, made to assert that Mr. Jefferson had sworn eternal "hospitality" to every form of tyranny. This was doubtless a typographical error. At the same time, one is tempted to conclude that it was not altogether accidental. The misquotation is unfortunately symptomatic of a confusion that manifestly prevails on a wide scale in this country. The attitude which is involved is perhaps the most distressing aspect of contemporary American life.

Confusion between hostility to tyranny and hospitality to it, a confusion which at first glance seems impossible, can be made to appear almost plausible by failure to observe an elementary distinction. It is a distinction which ought to be clear and manifest, and which it would be superfluous to comment upon but for an undoubtedly wide prevalence of the confusion. The distinction is the simple one between the attitude that is assumed towards a thing like tyranny and the attitude that is assumed towards its advocates or its opponents.

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Failure to have regard for the difference between views concerning a thing and the thing itself cuts in two directions. The result is either blind intolerance or confused indulgence. In other words, the simple fact is disregarded that toleration is, as a virtue, a golden mean. Thus, no one needs to be reminded that the source of most of the existing danger to our civil liberties consists in identification of hostility to a position with unwillingness to hear it advocated. Vigilance in this respect ought not, to say the least, to be relaxed. On the other hand, the obverse of intolerance of unattractive views takes the form of drawing, from willingness to permit a case to be made for a position, the conclusion that all positions for which a case can be made are equally deserving, not only of attention, but of acceptance. In present circumstances, this second attitude is, on the whole, even more depressing than the first.

Mr. Jefferson was famed for his wide hospitality, but there is no shred of evidence that he failed to distinguish carefully between hospitality to tyranny and hospitality to its advocates. Hence, he would undoubtedly view with sadness, if not with amazement, the travesty on liberalism that at present prevails on so wide a scale. This pseudo-liberalism manifests itself in various forms. The pattern is, unfortunately, all too familiar. This curious brand of liberalism is essentially an attitude of looking askance at all convictions. Indeed, it regards lack of conviction as the true mark of sophistication. With apparent disregard for the old problem of the fly and his choice of sides of the flypaper, this bastard liberalism considers pronounced preference for any position to be the result of "emotionalism"; and, by the same token, hostility to a position, regardless of fair examination, is viewed as the result of bias and prejudice. Righteous indignation is, in this view, bad form and worse. Unfortunately, moreover, the oncoming generations are the immediate heirs of the confusion. Their very virtues render them the more vulnerable. Their salutary unwillingness to accept without question all that is offered to them by their elders and their firm belief in the importance of suspending judgment result in a proneness to avoid judgments. Skepticism concerning "old stuff" tends to break down the distinction between what is old and what is old-fashioned, between what is worn and what is outworn. In the end, these younger generations may well produce a higher and better

set of values. A little faith in the young is sufficient to bring conviction that they will do so. But, meanwhile, the situation is not highly attractive; and it is even dangerous.

The real trouble with an effort at detachment which, through the attempt to avoid taking sides, is so exaggerated as to result in lack of convictions is that it defeats itself. Inasmuch as certain causes, and these not the most commendable, flourish where conviction is lacking, the very fact of not taking a stand favors, in reality, positions not grounded in moral conviction. This is especially true of the greatest issue which men confront today, namely, the issue of democracy versus dictatorship; and the situation has become even more clear since the issue has been submitted to the arbitrament of arms. In this second respect, the confused attitude of extreme detachment takes the somewhat curious form of exaggerated fear of propaganda, a fear accompanied by vigorous determination not to be influenced by propaganda. In this way, refusal to accept a substantial body of well-established considerations which favor the democracies plays squarely into the hands of the dictatorships, whose propaganda has as its aim encouragement of precisely such refusal. The result is what Miss Dorothy Thompson has well called "the propaganda of anti-propaganda." This result derives from the prevalent confusion concerning convictions; and the confusion in turn involves a simple logical fallacy. The proposition that the aim of propaganda is to convince is apparently made to yield the conclusion that convictions are the result of propaganda.

Just as the case for dictatorship gains strength from confusion and from prevailing lack of conviction, so the cause of democracy finds it correspondingly difficult to flourish where the same conditions are present. Unfortunately, no simple solution for such a difficulty suggests itself. The principal source of hope is in appearance not very imposing. It requires no small modicum of faith. If the case against dictatorship and the case for democracy are repeatedly stated with clarity and with conviction, the truth may end by being convincing. Such is the reason that so much importance attaches to serious treatment of the issue between dictatorship and democracy by competent thinkers. In this context, friends of the truth and of democracy ought to be grateful to R. M. MacIver.

The title *Leviathan and the People* is an intriguing one. Professor MacIver is concerned with the "new" Leviathan as distinguished from the "old." The old Leviathan is, of course, the Leviathan of Thomas Hobbes, that "mortal God" of which he asserted that "upon earth there is no power to compare with it," in other words, the state. The new Leviathan is separated in time from the old by two intervening phenomena of great importance. In the first place, political democracy in the interval bloomed and flourished, though in some places only for a short span; and, in the second place and even more important, the state, influenced by the conditions commonly associated with the Industrial Revolution, has so widely extended its control and expanded its activity that it has become instead of a negative state a positive state, instead of a police state a service state, instead of a state of laissez faire a collectivized and socialized state. This phenomenal growth of the state's sphere of activity is what has given to the new Leviathan its imposing character; and yet political democracy, though it has undergone great strain because of this very growth, has in some places held out. Hence, in the new form, there are in reality, Professor MacIver suggests, two Leviathans. "For democracy too has taken on the dimensions of Leviathan, though without his terror." The other Leviathan is, of course, "the dictatorial or totalitarian state."

Professor MacIver, in tracing the transition from the old to the new Leviathan, stresses an important historical distinction between democracy and dictatorship. States have in all cases been faced with difficulties, with crises, and with emergencies; but whereas political democracy has resulted from, and developed through, "a long series of adaptations" to critical needs and demands, "dictatorship is the swift solution of an emergency." In turn, this distinction is made the basis of an historical argument in favor of democracy. Professor MacIver contends very persuasively that dictatorship is, in its very nature and in its works, revealed to be temporary. "and not least in its proud claim to be eternal." This contention for the superiority of democracy is buttressed by extended successive treatments of the "genius of dictatorship" and of the "genius of democracy," the "final argument" being for democracy.

The fact that current argument of the issue between dictatorship

and democracy proceeds in a mental atmosphere which is unfavorable to democracy and propitious for dictatorship is explicitly recognized by Professor MacIver. Thus, while stating his hope that he will present the principles of democracy and dictatorship "fairly and without distortion," he vigorously asserts that he will "not take refuge in the false objectivity which deals with human values as though they were not values at all and vainly claims for this indifference the name of science." In other passages, Professor MacIver is in this respect less effective. He raises, to answer in the negative, the question whether neutrality towards, rather than condemnation of, dictatorship is the proper attitude for the scholar; and distinctions unfortunately become somewhat vague. But Professor MacIver is clear about the importance of convictions and values. Having imperceptibly shifted the question to that of justifying dictatorship, he ends that part of his discussion on a strong note. Since dictatorship has sworn hostility to free thought and free discussion, "the scholar who justifies dictatorship refutes his own existence." All such scholars are consciously or unconsciously guilty of betrayal; "for their professed objective is the discovery of truth, and they know in their hearts that dictatorship and the quest for truth cannot live together."

Professor MacIver's basic position is so sound and so congenial and he performs such yeoman service in a good cause that adverse criticism of his little book would be almost invidious. By the same token, some points at which one might think to detect lapses turn out to be incidental points, even though some of the incidents are important. Thus, for example, Professor MacIver protests against use of the expression "economic democracy," asserting that, after puzzling for some time over the phrase, he is unable to understand what it means and is "lost in the fog." This attitude is the more surprising when considered in connection with various views expressed by Professor MacIver in the course of his discussion. He sees the causes of the transition from the old to the new Leviathan as primarily economic. Near the beginning of his first lecture, he states the inadequacy of laissez faire as one of the assumptions on which he will proceed; and, in that part of his volume which consists of commentary on the three lectures, he stresses more fully "the end of laissez faire." In another place, he agrees that "the most persistent prob-

lems of any government are economic problems"; and, in still another, he declares himself "in hearty sympathy" with such aims as protection of workers against exploitation, guaranty to them of the right of collective bargaining, a larger share for them in the fruits of industry, a higher standard of living, and security of tenure. And yet he is unwilling that these aims should be included in a concept denominated "economic democracy." The trouble would seem to involve several considerations. In the first place, democracy is notoriously difficult to define satisfactorily. Professor MacIver in considerable measure avoids the difficulty by suggesting "two simple criteria" by which democracy can be identified. The first consists of the proposition that "democracy puts into effect the distinction between the state and the community," and the second that "democracy depends on the free operation of conflicting opinions." It may well be that these tests will serve to identify democracy, and identification of a thing, though it clearly does not directly tell anything about the nature of the thing, may well contribute towards knowledge of the thing; but, in the circumstances, it is not strange that no light is thrown on the nature of economic democracy. As a matter of fact, Professor MacIver, after laying down his criteria, proceeds to apply standards such as parties, elections, and the like. This, likewise, clearly does not help. The basic difficulty would seem to be in a limited facility in sustained analogical thinking, including especially a tendency towards assumptions of identity at particularly unfortunate points. Nevertheless, Professor MacIver's motive, since it is closely and consistently connected with his basic convictions, is calculated to regain the sympathy of friends of democracy even where such friends are not in complete agreement with all aspects of his account of its genius. "The enemies of democracy," he says, "are ready enough to distort and misrepresent the meaning of democracy; its friends should not lend their aid."

The principal thing to be said about Professor MacIver's book is, it may be repeated, that it serves well a good cause. A distinguished scholar, a careful thinker, and an able writer states clearly and fairly an issue; and then, eschewing pseudo-sophisticated detachment, he takes sides squarely, with conviction and sincerity. If this is not the way to serve truth, it is difficult to see how else it is to be done.